Public Fasting;

OR,

The MANNER in which

CHRISTIANS

Should observe a

PUBLIC FAST.

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The Manner in which CHRISTIANS *ſhould obſerve a* PUBLIC FAST.

THE Seaſonableneſs of this Queſtion at this Time is apparent to every one. And I doubt not, but there are many at ſome Loſs how to act on ſuch a Solemnity, who would be glad to have ſome ſuitable and ſcriptural Advice upon the preſent Subject. Being willing therefore to give Aſſiſtance herein, I offer the following Thoughts; as containing ſome proper Directions in this ſerious Matter. In order to be able to exhibit proper Rules in the Caſe, I have ſeriouſly and attentively ſearched the ſacred Scriptures; and have extracted the whole from thence.

Without any farther Introduction, let me proceed to an immediate Anſwer to the above Queſtion, that every one to whom theſe Lines may come, may know what GOD requires of him, on the approaching public ſolemn Faſt, which is appointed to be obſerved on *Friday*, *February* the 11th.

It is taken for granted that there will be public Worſhip ſolemnized all the Kingdom over, on that Day; both in the eſtabliſhed Church and among the Diſſenters; and that the Miniſters of the Goſpel will make it their Buſineſs to adapt their Prayers and Diſcourſes to the Nature and Occaſion of the Solemnity. Accordingly it muſt likewiſe be taken for granted, that all Chriſtians ought, and that all ſerious Chriſtians will attend public Worſhip on that Day, if able. I hope none will venture to give way to light and trifling Excuſes; but will look upon

upon it as a Matter of Conſcience to attend the Sanctuary in the Time or Times of divine Service; and when there to attend with Decency, Seriouſneſs, and Diligence; avoiding every thing that has the Appearance of Irreverence and Levity; and this with a View to have their Hearts affected and their Souls ſuitably impreſt. I ſhall therefore dwell no longer upon this Part of the Worſhip of the Day.

Let not any Chriſtians imagine that the whole Obſervance of a Faſt conſiſts in an Attendance on the public Worſhip. There is much beſide to be done on ſuch a Day in the Cloſet or Family, in order to a due and proper Sanctification of a Faſt Day.

Let me then ſet forth, in as plain and familiar a Manner as I can, the ſeveral Things that are to be avoided, and performed on that Day; deducing the whole from the Word of God. And ſo I would ſhow you,

I. *What you are to abſtain from.*

II. *What you are to be employed in, on that Day.*

I. *What you are to abſtain from.* Which lies in theſe *four* Particulars.

1. Certainly you are to abſtain from *Sin* and Iniquity. This indeed we ought to do at all Times; endeavouring to be holy, harmleſs, undefiled and ſeparate from Sinners; after the Example of Chriſt our Lord. Sin on every Day is exceeding ſinful; but its Sinfulneſs is peculiarly aggravated at ſuch a Seaſon; when the Nation joins together as one Man, to confeſs their Iniquities and to deprecate deſerved Judgments. More particularly, if you have lived in the Love and Practice of any known Sins, now there is a ſpecial Call upon you to ſearch and try your Ways, and turn again to the Lord. *See* Iſa. lviii. 6. *Is not this the Faſt that I have cho-*

ſen? To looſe the Bands of Wickedneſs, to undo the heavy Burdens, &c. Let the Drunkard, the Swearer, the Extortioner, the Unjuſt, the unclean Perſon, and every other that has lived in the Practice of any Abomination, know, that unleſs he ceaſes from theſe Evils, and reſolves, in the Strength of the Lord, that wherein he has done Iniquity he will do ſo no more; his keeping the Faſt in other Reſpects will be to no valuable Purpoſe, nor be accepted of the Lord; but if he perſiſts in his Iniquities, he is continually treaſuring up Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and making continual Additions to the National Guilt.

2. You ſhould on this Day abſtain from *Labour*, and from all ſecular Employments throughout the Day. As worldly Buſineſs profanes the Sabbath Day, ſo it pollutes a Faſt Day. This is plain from the Direction given for the ſolemn Faſt on the Day of Atonement, *Lev.* xvi. 29. *Ye ſhall afflict your Souls and do no Work at all.* Let every one therefore be careful and conſcientious in contriving his ſecular Concerns beforehand, that he may be under no Neceſſity to attend to his worldly Affairs, but may devote the whole Time to the public or private Exerciſes of that Day.

3. You ſhould likewiſe abſtain from all carnal *Pleaſures*, Recreations and Indulgencies. In *Joel* ii. 15, 16. we have this Direction concerning a public Faſt, *Blow the Trumpet in Zion, ſanctify a Faſt, call a ſolemn Aſſembly, &c. let the Bridegroom go forth of his Chamber, and the Bride out of her Cloſet.* Intimating, that the very Bride and Bridegroom, though they have a perſonal Occaſion for Joy, yet upon ſuch a public ſolemn Call, they ſhould lay aſide their own Pleaſure, to join in with the public Mourning.

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The Saints of old, we find, laid aſide their Ornaments and put on Sackcloth, and uſed other Signs and Tokens of deep Mourning and Sorrow, on Faſt Days. All which evidently teach us, that we are to abridge ourſelves of our uſual Pleaſures, ſhould by no means ſpend any Part of the Time in Sports, or pleaſurable Amuſements and Gratifications; and ſhould baniſh every Thing either in Dreſs or Behaviour that has the Appearance of Levity, Gaiety, Delight, Pleaſure and Merriment; and ſhould put on all the decent Appearances of Gravity, Solemnity, and Concern of Mind; ſuited to the Deſign of the Day.

4. You ſhould on this Day abſtain even from your *ordinary Food.* This may be accounted an hard Saying, by many, and an unneceſſary Thing by others. But the Word of God (not our own Inclinations) is to be the Rule of our Conduct. The Word *Faſt* is no ambiguous Term in ſacred Writ; but has one uniform Signification; always implying an *Abſtinence from Food*; and I know not one Inſtance wherein it has a different Meaning. And beſides, there are many Places of Scripture may be produced, wherein the Word *Faſt* is diſtinctly explained in this Senſe. I will leave the Reader to turn to the following, 2 *Sam.* xii. 16, 17. *Ezra* x. 16. *Eſther* iv. 16. *Dan.* x. 2, 3. *Jonah* iii. 7. *Acts* ix. 9. xxvii. 33.

Now tho' this kind of Abſtinence may be looked upon by many as a trivial Circumſtance; yet it is ſo eſſential to the Nature of a Faſt, that it cannot be a Faſt without it. A Day ſet apart in an extraordinary Manner for divine Service may be called a Day of *Prayer*, or a Day of *Humiliation*; but cannot be called a *Faſt* with any Propriety, unleſs the Ap-

pointment of the Day includes in it this Abſtinence from ordinary Food.

If any ſhould aſk, Of what Uſe is this Abſtinence, or what Neceſſity there is for it? I would anſwer in three Particulars. (1) It is ſometimes a neceſſary Conſequence of deep Concern and Humiliation of Soul. If a Perſon has his Heart filled with Grief, he loſes all Reliſh, not only for Pleaſures and Diverſions, but for his uſual Suſtenance too. Thus Perſons that are under great Sorrow for the Deceaſe of a very dear Friend or Relative, are often ſo impreſſed as to be incapable of eating their Bread; and Tears are their Meat continually Day and Night. And I am perſwaded, that if we ſhould have on that Day a ſuitable deep Concern and Grief produced upon our Spirits under an awakening View of our National Sins and the Judgments we deſerve, we ſhould have little or no Inclination to partake of the common Supports of Life; ſo great are our Sins, and ſo critical our preſent Situation.

(2) This Abſtinence may therefore be looked upon as a becoming Token of our Humiliation before GOD; and an Acknowledgement of our Unworthineſs of the leaſt Mercy at his Hands. Hereby we profeſs that we are Sinners before the Lord exceedingly, and that we have forfeited the very Food we eat, and all the Neceſſaries and Comforts of Life. And,

(3) This Abſtinence is a very proper Means to diſpoſe us for the ſolemn Duties of the Day. The Exerciſes of ſuch a Day being all of a ſorrowful, humbling Nature, it is fit that the animal Frame ſhould be ſuited to and diſpoſed for that Work. We are to glorify GOD with our *Bodies* as well as with our Spirits, which are his. The Frame of the

Body,

Body, or of animal Nature, is evidently a very great Help or Hindrance to the Frame of the Soul. For the animal Spirits to be lively and chearful, tending to Gladneſs and Mirth, muſt be very unſuitable to a Faſt Day, and much better correſponds to a Feſtival or Day of Rejoicing. Now this Abſtinence from the uſual Supports of Life, has an Aptneſs and Tendency to put the Animal Frame into ſuch a Situation as becomes the Work of the Day. As therefore this is one grand End of the Act of *Faſting*, to be ſubſervient to the Frame of the Mind; it therefore evidently becomes us to uſe as much Abſtinence as can be ſubordinate to ſuch an End. And I believe if we attended more to this Particular, rather than to an Indulgence of the Appetite, we ſhould, by the divine Bleſſing, find our ſpiritual Frames more happily correſpondent to ſuch humbling Solemnities. This very End of the Act of Faſting likewiſe inſtructs us, that we are not to obſerve it with ſuch Rigour and Exactneſs as actually to unfit us for the ſpiritual Work of the Day: which muſt be determined by every one's Conſtitution, upon that Rule in *Hoſea* vi. 6. *I have deſired Mercy and not Sacrifice.* Only let every one act conſcientiouſly in the Fear of God, conforming to this Abſtinence as much as may ſafely be done.

Thus I have ſhown what you are to abſtain from on a Faſt Day, namely, from *Sin*, from *Labour*, from *Pleaſure*, and from *Food.* I would now proceed,

II. To ſhew *what you are to be employed in* on ſuch a Day. And I find that the Holy Scriptures direct us to attend to the following Services.

1. To *Reading* ſome ſuitable Portions of ſacred Writ, as was done in the public Faſt in the Time *Nehemiah*, ix. 3. And the Nature of the Thing tells us, that we ſhould make Choice of thoſe Parts of

of Scripture, as tend to ſhew us the Sinfulneſs of our Sins, the Awfulneſs of divine deſerved Judgments, *&c.* and ſo to humble our Souls before God. The Holy Bible abounds with ſuch Chapters, as repreſent the Caſe of God's profeſſing People of old, ſimilar to our Caſe, our Sins, and our Danger, as a Nation. I would not attempt to confine you to any; but it may poſſibly be a Help to ſome Perſons if I juſt mention a few.

I would therefore take the Freedom to nominate the following affectionate, inſtructive, and humbling Chapters, as fit to be read in the Family or Cloſet, as well as in public on ſuch an Occaſion, *Deut.* chap. xxviii. and xxxii. the 9th Chapter of *Ezra*, the 9th of *Nehemiah*, and the 9th of *Daniel*.

2. You ſhould attend to ſolemn *Meditation* and ſerious *Conſideration:* according to the Direction in *Haggai* i. 5. Thus *ſaith the* LORD *of Hoſts, conſider your Ways.* We ſhould ſet ourſelves to think over and revolve in our Minds thoſe Things concerning ourſelves and others as will tend to excite and promote a Spirit of Humiliation and true Repentance. Particularly I would adviſe, that we ſhould look attentively in the firſt Place into our own Sins and Corruptions; the Unworthineſs of our Perſons and the Imperfections of our Duties. Then in the next Place to look around us, and obſerve how Iniquity and Infidelity abound, and the Love of many waxes cold; what a ſad Departure there is from the Doctrines, Spirit, and Practice of the Goſpel; conſidering ourſelves at the ſame Time as a Part of that Nation that is thus ſunk by Iniquity. It may be proper likewiſe to obſerve what Tokens, what awful Tokens there are of the Divine Diſpleaſure againſt us, in the Diſappointments we have met with, and in the critical Situation

tion wherein we at preſent ſtand. And while we are thus attempting to affect our Hearts with ſuch ſolemn Views of Things, let us guard againſt a Spirit of Anger and Reſentment againſt others; which would rather make us proud than humble. Let us rather turn in upon ourſelves, and ſee what Share we ourſelves have in the National Guilt; and remember, that we ourſelves ſhould have been as vile as the vileſt, had God given us up to the Corruptions of our own Hearts. Such Contemplations as theſe, though they are far from being delightful, yet they are very proper and neceſſary; and may become very uſeful to us.

3. You ſhould addreſs yourſelves to humble *Confeſſion* and *Supplication*. According to the Example of the holy Prophet *Daniel*, who in his ſolemn Faſt *prayed unto the Lord and made his Confeſſion*, Dan. ix. 3, 4.

Every Perſon apart, and every Family apart, ought to preſent themſelves before the Throne of Grace, confeſſing their Sins, deprecating divine Judgments, and ſupplicating divine Favours. This is certainly one great Part of the Work of the Day, which Chriſtians ought to attend to, not only in the public Aſſembly, but likewiſe in their Cloſets and Families. We ſhould endeavour to be more peculiarly ſolemn, affectionate and earneſt in our Addreſſes to God upon ſuch an Occaſion, pouring forth our Souls before the Lord in humble Confeſſion, ardent Petition, and importunate Pleading: Confeſſing our own Sins, the Sins of our Families, the Sins of our Churches, and of our Nation: Begging pardoning Grace, renewing Grace, and quickening Grace for ourſelves and others: not forgetting to intercede with God for our rightful Sovereign King *George*, for the Prince of *Wales*, and all the Royal Family;

Family; for the Miniſtry of State, for both Houſes of Parliament, and for all in Authority; that they may be divinely directed to act with all Faithfulneſs for the Welfare of the Nation, the Suppreſſion of Vice, and the Promotion of true Religion and Virtue. Deprecating deſerved Judgments, and pleading the Mercies of our God, the Merits of our Saviour, the Neceſſity of our Caſe, and the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

4. I muſt likewiſe adviſe that the Work of the Day be continued by *Converſation* with each other upon ſuitable Subjects. What Time is not taken up in public or ſecret Devotions may be well employed by talking ſeriouſly with our Children, or with our Servants, or with one another, about the declining State of Religion, the Sins of the Nation, the Judgments deſerved and feared, and the Neceſſity that God ſhould revive his Work in the midſt of the Years.

Theſe Things ſhould be talked over, not in a barely hiſtorical or ſpeculative manner, but with a ſerious View to farther the Work of Humiliation in our own Souls, and in the Souls of others. In doing this we ſhall follow the Example of thoſe gracious Perſons who are mentioned with a ſpecial Regard in *Malachi* iii. 16. *Then they that feared the* LORD *ſpake often one to another, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the* LORD, *and that thought on his Name.*

5. Neither ſhould *Singing* be omitted either in public or private, on ſuch an Occaſion. For tho' this Duty at firſt View has the Idea of Joy and Pleaſure in it; yet we find there are penitential as well as triumphant Pſalms ſet before us in the Word of God, ſuch as are ſuited to humble us before the Lord, as well as to make us joyful in him. Accord-

cordingly, we find that *David* was led by the Spirit to pen the 51ſt Pſalm, as an Expreſſion of his true Humiliation and Repentance. And beſides we muſt remember, that in the worſt of Times, and upon the moſt humbling and ſorrowful Occaſions, there is ſtill Room left for Praiſe and Thankſgiving.

6. In the laſt Place, you are called upon on this Occaſion to perform *Works of Mercy and Charity*, to the Diſtreſſed and Neceſſitous. According to what the LORD ſays by the Prophet *Iſaiah*, ch. lviii. 6, 7. *Is not this the Faſt that I have choſen? To looſe the Bands of Wickedneſs, to undo the heavy Burdens, and to let the Oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every Yoke? Is it not to deal thy Bread to the Hungry, and that thou bring the Poor that are caſt out to thy Houſe? When thou ſeeſt the Naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own Fleſh?*

Nothing is more proper as an outward Acknowledgment of our unworthineſs before the Lord, of our Dependance upon him, and of our expecting Mercy from him, than thus to extend our Liberality to the Poor and Neceſſitous. Hereby we ſhew that our Hearts are thankful for the comfortable Supplies we enjoy, and that we compaſſionate the Miſeries of our Fellow-Creatures. I would therefore hope that the Hearts and Hands of all thoſe who have any Property will be open on the Faſt Day, liberally to contribute to relieve the Neceſſities of the Poor, who are pinched with Hunger and Cold, through the Dearneſs of Proviſions, and the Severity of the Winter.

Thus you have a plain and ſummary View of what you are to abſtain from, and what you are to be employed in, on the Faſt Day. How that, ceaſing to do Evil, and abſtaining from Labour, Pleaſure, and your ordinary Food; you are not only to give a ſerious and conſcientious Attendance

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on the Public Worſhip of the Day; but likewiſe in your Cloſets and Families to read over ſome ſuitable Portions of ſacred Writ, to meditate upon ſoul-humbling Subjects, to addreſs the Lord by ſecret and humble Confeſſion and Supplication, to Sing the Praiſes of the Lord; and that none of the Day be loſt or miſapplied, to converſe with each other in a ſerious manner about the Things which occaſioned the Appointment of the Faſt: to all which you are to add a liberal Contribution of Part of your Subſtance to refreſh the Bowels, and ſupply the Wants of the Poor and Needy.

I ſhall conclude with a few general Cautions and Directions in brief.

(1.) Beware of ſpiritual Pride, truſting in or boaſting of your Performances or Devotions. If you value yourſelves upon what you do, this will be very offenſive to the holy and jealous God, and will be deſtructive of that true Humility which is ſo neceſſary upon the Occaſion.

(2.) Let your Hopes of Mercy be founded only upon the Merits and Interceſſion of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. While you are viewing the Sinfulneſs of Sin, and lamenting before God your own Caſe, and the State of the Nation, turn your Eyes to him, whoſe Blood alone is able to cleanſe from all Sin.

(3.) Carry the Solemnities of the Day into your future Life. Do not forget what you have been confeſſing of, and praying for before God. Do not imagine that when the Day is over you have no more to do; but keep up in a continual Remembrance the Occaſion, and the Solemnities of it; that the Fruits of it may appear in the Frame of your Hearts, and the Conduct of your Lives ever after.

Thus we may humbly hope that the Lord will hear our Supplications, and grant us and our Nation thoſe temporal and ſpiritual Bleſſings, which may make us rejoice in his Favour and Salvation.

FINIS.